

ARE PERFINS JUST HOLES?

BY VOJTECH MAXA

There is a popular saying that Perfins collectors just look at the holes--that for them the holes mean everything and the stamps nothing. But at the risk of repeating the obvious, I have to stress that the stamp holds the holes together and cannot be separated from them. Accordingly, I propose that we do not collect Perfins but rather that we collect Perfanned stamps.

In any human activity it is useful to employ clear and correct definitions. This applies to philately in general and to Perfins in particular.

If the term Perfins is a combination of the words PERforated INitials (or INsignia) then it applies just to the holes. But if we speak of the final product, we should perhaps use the term Perfanned Stamp.

This distinction is not mere formality. If we realize that a Perfin, that is, the perforated symbol, cannot exist alone but only in connection with a stamp, we will take a greater interest in the stamp itself and we will find our own collections richer.

Take an example from my country, Czechoslovakia. In the preface to my catalog of the Perfins of Czechoslovakia, I note that my country has had a complicated history. Since 1877 when Perfins were first introduced, the stamps of six different postal authorities have been valid in different parts of present-day Czechoslovakia.

Even a very basic collection of Czechoslovak Perfins has to demonstrate this fact. To show the different countries involved, the stamps have to be mounted face upward.

The same situation exists in many countries which have issued Perfins. The face of the stamps becomes important in the story of the Perfin.

U. S. Perfins are no exception. William Corliss is making a very interesting study of Perfins on the 1902 Prominent Americans series (see the Bulletin for January and March 1973). Such a study cannot be made without looking at the face of the stamp. Other people collect Perfinson precancelled stamps, on stamps with certain designs, and so forth.

In our Czech Perfins Club and in the Zpravodaj I edit, I always stress that Perfins should be mounted face up. If they are put in acetate mounts with black backings, the design of the Perfin usually stands out clearly. An accompanying drawing or photograph will of course be helpful.

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There is another reason for mounting Perfins face upward. Perfin collectors often are ridiculed at stamp exhibitions because they show "just the holes." Mounting Perfins face down adds to the reputation Perfins sometimes have of not being a fit subject for serious philatelists.

A Perfins collector should not limit his interest to holes only. Perfins are far more than just holes. They have stories to tell, they have historical value, and they are very much a subject of serious study.

But they are on stamps and they should be shown to be on stamps by being mounted with the stamps face up.